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AUTHOR(S):

Sasaki, Taku

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# On happiness in Locke's decision-making theory

**Taku Sasaki**

For the publication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Locke drastically rewrote *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, in particular, the chapter 'Of Power'. He incorporated two new ideas into his decision-making theory. The first was desire as a factor of 'deciding will'. The second was the introduction of 'the doctrine of suspension'. Many researchers have claimed that Locke has, as a result of incorporating these corrections, brought about some inconsistency into his theory of decision-making. For example, Magri argues that there are two inconsistent views of motivational force, that is 'internalism' and 'externalism' about judgment, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition that remain uncorrected in further revisions.

However, if we focus on his conception of happiness, we can see that Locke's basic framework does not change and is consistent in all the editions. In this paper, I show this through criticizing Magri's argument. According to him, there are two big changes between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> editions. One is the transition from internalism to externalism in the above-mentioned view of motivation. The other is the introduction of the notion of 'desire for happiness'. I argue that the changes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition are not as radical as Magri claims.

## Introduction

It is rare that Locke is referred to as an important figure when we talk about the history of the problem of free will. His theory is mostly just ignored as a similar one as Hobbes' or Hume's consideration. There seem to be two main reasons for this. One is that Locke himself criticized the self-determination of the will and argued for volitional determinism by desire, as do Hobbes and Hume. The other is that Locke's theory of action or decision-

making seems to be intrinsically inconsistent in the light of contemporary compatibilistic understandings of free will and determinism.

There are two schools of interpreting Locke. One is compatibilistic and the other is libertarian. These readings correspond to schools in contemporary debates on the problem of free will. These schools are typically made up of the following positions: compatibilism, naturalism and externalism on the one hand and libertarianism, non-naturalism and internalism on the other. These combinations seem to be reflected in the interpretations of Locke. And Locke looks like he adopts the compatibilistic position at first sight. Locke was after all a physician, and also advanced philosophy based on early modern atomic theory. He argued for a desire-based decision-making theory. These all support the compatibilist and naturalist view. This is now a very familiar way of reading Locke.

However, there is a problem for the compatibilist reading of Locke. As I will demonstrate, it is due to the straightforward application of contemporary framework without due concern for the more subtle features of Locke's view. A closer examination reveals the *consistency* of his view. In this paper, I focus on Locke's conception of 'happiness' and criticize some aspects of the naturalistic-compatibilism interpretation of his theory of decision-making.

For the publication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Locke drastically rewrote *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.<sup>1</sup> Problems have been raised with the changes that he made. The chapter, 'Of Power', which addresses issue of free will, in particular, saw significant revisions. The most controversial change was the introduction of his 'the doctrine of suspension'.<sup>2</sup> I provide here the context of this introduction. He originally accepted volitional determinism. According to this view, the will is necessarily determined by something other than the will itself. In the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Locke thought this factor was idea of the good. This view was, however, criticized because of the issue of 'weakness of will'. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, therefore, he argued that the factor that determines the will is 'desire'.

However, if desire determines the will, we could only engage in a course action by chance. For our will is determined by 'dynamics of desires' which involve randomness in nature. In response to this problem, Locke introduces the doctrine of suspension, which

<sup>1</sup> Locke's *Essay* is quoted from the following edition: J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, P. H. Nidditch (ed.), Oxford University Press, 1987. Following Magri with a suggestion by V. Chappell, I also note the edition(s) of the *Essay*, as well as the Book, Chapter and Section.

<sup>2</sup> The doctrine of suspension introduces the power to suspend desire and allows us to refrain from following a particular course of action. The phrase 'the doctrine of suspension' is from V. Chappell 1994.

makes us able to resist the temptations of desire and makes us act instead in accord with rational judgment. However, there now arises a further question: What determines the (will of) suspension? Some, such as V. Chappell answer the question 'Nothing', and argue that the doctrine of suspension is not consistent with the volitional determinism (that means they take the suspension as the action caused by the will itself).<sup>3</sup> This is a central problem for Locke.

T. Magri's 'Locke, Suspension of Desire, and the Remote Good' provides another kind of approach to the question above. Given the compatibilist-naturalist interpretations, he defends volitional determinism by claiming that 'desire for happiness' is the cause of the suspension. However, this raises a further problem. He argues that there are two positions on motivation in Locke's theory of action: motivational internalism and motivational externalism about judgment.<sup>4</sup> According to Magri, Locke changed his position from internalism to externalism in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. There remained, however, a special kind of internalism in the case of happiness: happiness only has *internal* motivation in Locke's framework. As compatibilists are not inclined to accept judgement internalism, this is another problem for Locke if we attempt to understand him a compatibilist.

In this paper, I attempt to show two things in response to the problems raised above. Firstly, Locke's framework of determination of the will does not change and has consistency through all the editions. Secondly, contra Magri, there is neither an internalistic position in his theory nor a desire-based externalistic position. The key conception is 'happiness'. Magri argues that happiness comes to play a role in decision-making only after the introduction of the doctrine of suspension. In contrast to this, I argue that happiness plays an important role even in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition and has continuity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, despite the corrections made. I demonstrate this, in the following three steps. In the first section, I give a summary of Magri's position and an outline of internalism and externalism. In the second section, I consider Locke's conception of happiness more deeply. Finally, in the third section, I show there is neither internalism nor externalism which Magri reads into Locke. In the result, I demonstrate Locke has a consistent theory of decision-making through all the editions.

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<sup>3</sup> For more detail on this line of argument, see Chappell 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Strictly speaking, that which has motivational force in Locke's moral psychology is 'idea', not 'judgment'. It is, therefore, more accurate, in my view, to call his position motivational internalism (or externalism) about *ideas*. For more on the claim that all propositions are made of combination of ideas in Locke's idealism, see his definition of knowledge at 1–5 E IV. i. 2: 525.

## Motivational internalism and externalism in Locke: Magri's interpretation

The original purpose of Magri's work is to explain how we can differentiate the real value of temporally remote good from the present good. The value of the remote good seems smaller than it really is due to its remoteness. Thus, the value of a remote good, though great, can seem less than the value of a less great, but present, good. Given this, it is hard for us to choose the bigger remote good. Magri thinks this is a *prima facie* serious problem for Locke's volitional determinism of desire because Locke defines good hedonistically.<sup>5</sup> However, this is solved by the doctrine of suspension. Nevertheless, the introduction of the doctrine produces another problem from the point of view of judgment motivation.

Magri analyses Locke's correction as a move from motivational internalism to motivational externalism. Magri defines motivational internalism and externalism as follows:

Motivational internalism: which insists that there is 'the connection between pleasure, value and motivation'.<sup>6</sup>

Motivational externalism: which claims that '[t]he two mental states of apprehending the greater good and of being motivated by it can only be contingently related'.<sup>7</sup>

In Locke's philosophy 'pleasure' or 'value' means, more precisely, the 'idea of pleasure' or the 'idea of value'. Therefore, we can take internalism to be a view that affirms the causal relation between idea and motivational force (and action), and externalism to be a view that require some kind of medium, typically desire, to connect them.

According to Magri, Locke is a motivational internalist in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition and becomes an externalist in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.<sup>8</sup> As mentioned above, this change is due to the incorporation of the notion of desire. Desire, for Locke, is 'an uneasiness of the Mind for want of some absent good'.<sup>9</sup> Uneasiness is classified as an idea of 'mixed mode'. In Magri's interpretation 'uneasiness can have an intrinsic and direct motivational force'. Additionally, '[m]otivational force is intrinsic to uneasiness, because it is in itself an unpleasant feeling,

<sup>5</sup> By which I mean Locke defines good in terms of pleasure and pain. See 1–5 E II. xxi. 2: 229.

<sup>6</sup> Magri 2000: 58–9. See also 1 E II. xxi. 29: 248–9n.

<sup>7</sup> Magri 2000: 58. See also 2–5 E II. xxi. 35: 253 and, 2–5 E II. xxi. 44: 260.

<sup>8</sup> Magri 2000: 58.

<sup>9</sup> 2–5 E II. xxi. 31: 251.

a feeling that we are determined to stop or to avoid'.<sup>10</sup> In the view of externalism, the will is determined in accord with the 'hydraulic model of desire' where the most 'pressing and topping',<sup>11</sup> desire determines the will. An idea of good cannot cause us to perform an action without desire and thus the relationship between our action and any idea of the good becomes contingent. Therefore, if we perform a right action, it was only because of luck.

To avoid such cases, Locke introduces the doctrine of suspension:

For the mind having in most cases, as is evident in Experience, a power to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desire, and so all, one after another, is at liberty to consider the objects of them; examine them on all sides, and weigh them with others.<sup>12</sup>

Besides, we can also 'raise our desires in a due proportion to the value of that good'.<sup>13</sup> By this power, Locke argues, we can ignore the merely apparent high value of the present good and choose those actions that are actually valuable, even if they are remote.

One of the Magri's great contributions to the study of Locke is to give an answer the question of what might motivate the suspension. This question is especially serious for the compatibilist interpretations of Locke because of the following dilemma. In the first horn, if we suppose some particular desire as the motivation for the suspension, then it depends luck whether the suspension occurs or not. In the second horn, if there is no motivation or causation of the suspension, then this contradicts volitional determinism.

To solve this dilemma Magri considers the 'inclination to happiness'. He cites following remarks of Locke:

We are by the necessity of preferring and pursuing true happiness as our greatest good, obliged to suspend the satisfaction of our desire in particular cases. [*Essay*, p. 266; 2–5 E II, xxi, §51.]<sup>14</sup>

The inclination, and tendency of their nature to happiness is an obligation, and motive to them, to take care not to mistake, or miss it. [*Essay*, pp. 266–7; 2–5 E II, xxi, §52.]<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Magri 2000: 65. See also 2–5 E II, xxi, 31: 251.

<sup>11</sup> 2–5 E II, xxi, 38: 256.

<sup>12</sup> 2–5 E II, xxi, 47: 263.

<sup>13</sup> 2–5 E II, xxi, 46: 262.

<sup>14</sup> Magri 2000: 65. What is in brackets is Magri's note.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Since the ‘desire for happiness’ (to use Magri’s term<sup>16</sup>) motivates the suspension, then there is no contradiction with volitional determinism; and since the desire for happiness is not particular but general<sup>17</sup>, the suspension does not depend on luck.

The last claim is supported by the conception of happiness. According to Magri, happiness is ‘a structure for maximizing pleasure or goodness’.<sup>18</sup> This conception makes us weigh the real values of various ideas of the good. Having done this, our decisions have a clear criterion and do not depend on luck. As a result we can act in accordance with ‘the nature of a rational being’.<sup>19</sup>

It seems, therefore, as if the problem is solved. However, another problem arises. First of all, volitional determinism still holds because the doctrine of suspension admits that desire determines the will after the suspension (due to the fact that the suspension makes dominating desires). However, the motivational force that desire intrinsically had is lost.<sup>20</sup> All motivational force becomes derived from the force of happiness after the adoption of the doctrine of suspension. The problem lies in the fact that happiness has intrinsic and non-naturalistic motivational force.<sup>21</sup> Happiness only has a non-derivative motivational force. This is made clear by the causal connection between the idea of happiness and the act of the suspension. According to Magri, the conception of happiness has a strange status in Locke’s otherwise completely naturalistic framework of volitional determinism of desire. He points out that Locke ‘offers no satisfying explanation of this special kind of internal, general desire for the greatest good’.<sup>22</sup> Therefore the doctrine of suspension remains a problem.

## Magri’s problem and the continuity of happiness

Magri’s interpretation is highly evaluated with respect to giving an answer to the question what causes the suspension. Besides, he provides ever more sophisticated view on Locke’s decision-making structure from the compatibilist-naturalist view. I think, however, his consideration of the ‘inclination to happiness’ is missing something important, notwithstanding

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<sup>16</sup> Magri 2000: 66

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Magri 2000: 68.

<sup>19</sup> Magri 2000: 69. See also 2–5 II. xxi. 51: 266.

<sup>20</sup> Magri 2000: 66.

<sup>21</sup> Magri 2000: 70.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

his attempt to give 'a careful reading of some parts of Locke's discussion'.<sup>23</sup> What he misses is that happiness in fact plays a role *before* the suspension. Locke says

[f]or as much as whilst we are under any *uneasiness*, we cannot apprehend ourselves happy, or in the way to it. Pain and *uneasiness* being, by every one, concluded and felt to be inconsistent with happiness, ... And therefore that which of course determines the choice of our *will* to the next action, will always be the removing of pain, as long as we have any left, as the first and necessary step towards happiness.<sup>24</sup>

This is one of the explanations Locke gives as to why only desire can determine the will. We can see the motivational-force-giving-role of happiness here. It is the case that happiness works throughout the decision-making process. Locke thinks happiness is something universal:

Nature, I confess, has put into man a desire of Happiness, and an aversion to Misery: These indeed are innate practical Principles, which (as practical Principles ought) do continue constantly to operate and influence all our Actions without ceasing: These may be observed in all Persons and all Ages, steady and universal.<sup>25</sup>

Happiness, for Locke, is a kind of 'practical principle'. Note that this view originates from the 1<sup>st</sup> edition. Therefore, happiness plays a role throughout, even where the dynamics of desire are at work. Magri misses this because of his misunderstanding of the conception of happiness. He understands it as 'maximizing pleasure or goodness'. This is in order to set the standard of assessing the value of remote good. However, it is too restrictive to be a universal principle. There is evidence of the maximizing conception of happiness in Locke:

*Happiness* then in its full extent is the utmost Pleasure we are capable of, and *Misery* the utmost Pain: . . .<sup>26</sup>

But Locke continues,

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<sup>23</sup> Magri 2000: 55.

<sup>24</sup> 2–5 E II. xxi. 36: 254.

<sup>25</sup> 1–5 I. iii. 3: 67.

<sup>26</sup> 2–5 E II. xxi. 42: 258, 1 E II. xxi. 29: 248n.



And the lowest degree of what can be called *Happiness* is so much ease from all Pain, and so much present Pleasure, as without which any one cannot be content.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of deciding the will, the emphasis is on ‘avoiding pain’ and thus ‘the lowest degree’ of happiness does not involve maximizing. As Locke says, ‘[h]appiness and misery are the names of two extremes, the utmost bounds whereof we know not’.<sup>28</sup> We, who live in this (secular) world, can not know nor acquire the true happiness, ‘the utmost pleasure’.<sup>29</sup>

Magri sees the intrinsic motivational force of desire in the suspension inactive situation. However, according to the conception of happiness shown here, even in this situation desire takes the motivational force from happiness. Therefore, desire has no the intrinsic force. This important assumption of motivational externalism thus fails to hold.

## Consistency of Locke

I turn now to the following question: Are there any fundamental changes or inconsistencies in Locke’s theory? My answer is ‘No’. I argue that there is a consistent framework through all the editions and that no fundamental change occurs. This is because of two things: the role of happiness and the nature of uneasiness.

As noted previously, the idea of the universality of the inclination to happiness appears in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition. This means that, even in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition, happiness has a motivation-giving-role. Therefore, the internalism that Magri takes as the position held in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition has to be modified to read as follows: the view that affirms the causal relationship between the idea of good and the deciding the will *through happiness*. However, this view is no longer an internalist one. Although the idea of happiness might have internal motivational force, the idea of particular good, which is argued to have intrinsic motivational force according to Magri, does not have any independent force. Thus, the modified view is not purely internalistic.

The decision-making framework combined with the doctrine of suspension has the same structure. This is the ‘non-naturalist’ position discussed at the end of the first section. According to this position, all desire loses its intrinsic motivational force and also an idea of

<sup>27</sup> 4–5 E II. xxi. 42: 258. This sentence was added in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition and rewritten in the 4<sup>th</sup> edition.

<sup>28</sup> 2–5 E II. xxi. 41: 258, 1 E II. xxi. 29: 248n.

<sup>29</sup> According to Locke, we can acquire the true happiness only in a future life. See 2–5 II. xxi. 38: 255.

remote good has a causal relation with decision-making by means of the desire for happiness. Though we need to create a new desire (or strengthen a desire) by weighing various goods in decision-making, there is no structural difference in that a desire, that is also an idea of good as explained below, comes to have the motivational force with the aid of happiness.

The last obstacle to my interpretation is decision making in a situation without the doctrine of suspension given the changes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Magri argues that this is the typical situation for externalism. However, as shown in the last section, happiness plays a necessary role here. Besides, we might consider desire to be an idea with motivational force: uneasiness. Here is Locke's definition of desire:

The uneasiness a man finds in himself upon the absence of any thing, whose present enjoyment carries the *Idea* of delight with it, is that we call *Desire*; which is greater or less, as that uneasiness is more or less vehement.<sup>30</sup>

The idea of desire is composed by the idea of lacking what good and also by uneasiness. Uneasiness is a kind of pain.<sup>31</sup> Uneasiness can be motivating because it is a kind of pain and because our inclination to happiness requires the removal of pain, due to our nature as human beings. If we can see desire and uneasiness as pain, we can also see the process of the determination of the will by desire as the determination by the idea of pain, because removing pain is indeed a kind of good:

Things then are good or evil, only in reference to pleasure or pain. That we call good, which is apt to cause or increase pleasure, or diminish pain in us; or else to procure or preserve us the possession of any other good, or absence, of any evil.<sup>32</sup>

So, decision making by desire is decision making by the idea of the good. This means the motivational force that desire has can be explained as follows: when desire has the motivational force to determine the will, it is because removing the pain of desire is judged to be the most effective way of bringing about happiness. If we put this point together with

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<sup>30</sup> 1–5 E II. xx. 6: 230.

<sup>31</sup> 'For whether we call it Satisfaction, Delight, Pleasure, Happiness, *etc.* on the one side; or Uneasiness, Trouble, Pain, Torment, Anguish, Misery, *etc.* on the other, they are still but different degrees of the same thing, and belong to the *Ideas* of *Pleasure* and *Pain*, Delight or Uneasiness' (1–5 E II. vii. 2: 128–9).

<sup>32</sup> 1–5 E II. xx. 2: 229.

the above mentioned thought that desire needs the help of happiness to determine the will, we can see the same structure as the Magri's 1<sup>st</sup> edition internalism. It is, indeed, a kind of externalism. However, it is neither the pure kind, nor the general kind, of naturalistic volitional determinism like that of Hume and Hobbes.

## Conclusion and implication

To conclude, there is a continuity when it comes to the conceptions of happiness and of the good in Locke's *Essay*. In addition, there is the continuity of the decision-making framework throughout the editions. No basic change is made by the rewriting process. My conclusion is that Locke does not adopt either a pure kind of internalism or a pure kind of externalism which are argued by Magri.

It might be objected that the framework of my interpretation does not have consistency in content though it does demonstrate continuity of the framework. My reply is that this constitutes an overly naïve understanding of compatibilism. Such an objection presupposes some combination of positions like those I mentioned in the opening section of this paper. These are internalism, libertarian and non-naturalism on the one hand, and externalism, compatibilism and naturalism on the other. There is no intrinsic conceptual link between these positions such that we must group them together in this way. It is only thinking in this way that makes my conclusion seem inconsistent. This highlights the risks of applying contemporary ways of thought to classic philosophy. Instead, we should try to develop a new position based on Locke's: non-naturalistic compatibilism. We must not feel forced to stick too closely to the contemporary dichotomy.

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